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SUBJECT: The Violence Problem

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I. Introductory Note

This despatch is essentially an up-dating and review of the information contained in the referenced despatch. As such it may be repetitive in part. It also reflects a country-team evaluation of the problem.

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A good deal is written and spoken about the violence problem, much of it seemingly contradictory. Part of the reason for this is that hard and fast facts or statistical data are simply not available, and hence evaluations and descriptions must be approximate. This, plus the natural drama of the subject matter, often results in exaggeration and even some distortion, especially in journalistic accounts of the situation which appear periodically in both the local and U.S. press. ^{1/} Another problem is often semantical. Because, for example, the traditional Colombian references to political violence used the term guerrilleros, the same word has been loosely applied by Colombians to current bandit bands. Calling them guerrillas, however, is misleading if it arouses in a reader's mind the classical and technical connotation of the term, for current violence is not insurrectional. Similarly the term "independent republics" is often applied loosely to almost any region under the influence or domination of a given person or band. The use of this term is a derivation from its past application to a historical territorial control exercised by Communists in Viotá (see below). Generalization of the term to mean just any caudillo influence is misleading because of the connotation it carries. Therefore, a good many alleged descriptions and "facts" concerning violence are more often impressionistic rather than realistic.

The Country Team has made every effort in the following report to check its evaluations and such facts as exist, and will continue to appraise the situation periodically and to evaluate reports and allegations as they appear.

II. Conclusions

An examination of the violence situation leads to the following estimate of the problem:

1. The "violence problem" is the result of and part of a complex mesh of historical, political, social and economic factors. It is thus so closely related to basic aspects of Colombian life as to be impossible of isolation as solely a military or law-enforcement problem. Measures taken to meet the problem must include coordinated military, social, economic and even political planning.
2. Present active violence is confined to a relatively small, although important, part of the country, and is essentially criminal banditry. It is not guerrilla warfare in the classical and technical sense of the term, i.e., it is not insurrectional.
3. There is little evidence of any comprehensive over-all coordination among the bandit bands, and some built-in barriers to such coordination exist in the form of rivalries and jealousies among bandit leaders of different political origins.
4. Only a very small amount of current bandit activity is traceable to any subversive, Communist or broadly political motivation. It is hence simplistic to think of the violence problem as merely a Communist or Castroist problem.

^{1/} See footnote on Page 5.

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5. Alongside the active violence pattern exists the pattern of caudillo control, i.e., dominance in certain rural areas by a local chieftain who in many cases was an ex-guerrilla during the political warfare period of 1948-1953. Such caudillos have para-military capability in that they have armed men available to them if necessary, although they are not now engaged in violence.

6. The danger in the situation is the potential which lies in the bandit and caudillo pattern, namely, that some or all of the existing para-military capability may be captured by subversive forces seeking an instrument of violence, or that purely domestic political questions may provoke such a breakdown in the rational accommodation of the two political parties as to spread once again into political warfare of the type in existence ten to twelve years ago. Most worrisome is that extremists may seek to break down public order and the system of government by stimulating bandit bands to terrorist activity to strain morale and the public order capability, or by stimulating political warfare again so as to unleash destructive energies that will of their own weight bring down the Government. These are more likely subversive goals than the initiation of a straightforward guerrilla rebellion.

7. The potential for large scale and insurrectional violence mentioned in 6 above rests on these factors:

A. Since some bandit leaders have power and influence in some areas and will wish to perpetuate their power unscrupulously, they are susceptible to cultivation or bribery by subversive forces. This has not been done to any significant degree as yet, although some Castroist-extremist attempts have been made to contact bands. However, there are indications that further and better organized attempts of this nature will be made in the future.

B. Similarly, the para-military capability of now passive caudillos may be stimulated to action by either intentional irritation of latent political rivalries or by the expansions of influence by extremist caudillos.

C. The Communist Party has dominant influence in a few regions of the country and to that extent may be said to have a geographic base; up to now the Communist Party has been essentially passive in its rural activity, and the strength and isolation of the Communist enclaves have actually been decreasing over the last five years. The Party nevertheless pays considerable attention to this phase of its activity, and has accumulated arms and continued training of auto-defense units.

8. The problem of active violence, i.e., banditry, is manageable in its present form and could be reduced to tolerable levels relatively quickly. The problem of potential violence springing from inter-party rivalries, sociological patterns and the existence of extremist enclaves is something else again which will require long, patient and determined across-the-boards efforts to overcome. There are, however, sufficiently favorable factors existing in the picture to suggest that the Government of Colombia possesses the capability of meeting both of these problems, if it undertakes determined and coordinated efforts to do so.

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The problem of "violence" has its origin in the politically inspired guerrilla warfare, which reached its peak during the 1948-1953 period. What is now known as "violence" is largely criminal banditry, that is, the operation of a number of individual armed bands of criminal elements, associated in some cases with ex-guerrilla groups or drawn from old guerrilla units, which murder and pillage in a pattern of banditry and protection racketeering.

The causes of continuing violence rest in a complex of sociological, historical and economic factors. The motivations of presently operating bands involve some or all of the following: a) a means of earning a living--i.e., gangsterism, protection racketeering; b) a war-lord type of power control; c) use of the bands by interested groups, through hiring or promised material support, as tools to terrorize or intimidate; d) sheer brutality and criminality.

It should at this point be made clear that it is impossible to establish neat categories and definitions to explain as complex and subtly shaded a situation as Colombia's violence pattern. And hence a number of gradations and qualifications need to be established. For example, it is fair to say that violence is no longer political in the sense that it was in the 1948-1953 period, i.e., directed and stimulated by political groups for essentially political reasons. At the same time it must be said that current violence has a political element in it of an essentially localized nature. Thus the armed bands may justify themselves and cloak their criminal acts by reference to political loyalty. In some instances, there is obvious communication with local "ward bosses" and even exchange of services for political protection. The longer the bands roam an area with impunity the greater is the influence and control they exert over that area. This thus shades over into a species of war-lord control and "political" influence, which a bandit leader may seek to perpetuate by either alliances with local party bosses or other forces or by occasional ententes with neighboring bandit leaders.

The protection of this type of influence and livelihood by the bandits, on one hand, and the regional control of ex-guerrilla caudillos on the other, has in some instances resulted in the establishment of channels of effective de facto authority similar in a sense to the extra-legal power exerted by, say, the Chicago underworld, the Mafia, or the Western cattle barons of the 19th century.

The bandit bands are obviously deadly enemies of established government and are disposed to combat it when it impinges or appears to impinge on their activity or area of influence. They may thus attack military units for strategic purposes designed to protect their sphere of operation. Since they cannot by definition exist successfully and at the same time permit effective extension of government control in their area, they may even be tempted to prepare for a confrontation with authority.

But the point is that even with this type of political content and challenge of authority, the aims are limited, with violence still highly localized and

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centered on basically criminal motivations--i.e., robbery, self-protection, racketeering--rather than political motivations--i.e., establishment of a given type of government or ideological warfare. Hence what should be clearly understood is that present day killings and robberies cannot be considered guerrilla activity in the technical and classical sense of that term. Present day violence is essentially criminal and not insurrectional. It would be unscientific but perhaps not inaccurate to conceive of the pattern as a mixture of the old west in the U.S., early 20th century Mexico and Sicily.

This is, of course, not to ignore the dangers of conversion of all or part of this violence capability into truly subversive or political activity. But this is presently potential rather than actual (see below).

There are no available statistics of any reliability covering the deaths from violence during the ten-year period 1948-1958. The best and most acceptable estimate in the Embassy's opinion is between 200,000 to 250,000. 1/

Annual totals since that time were: 1958--5,342; 1959--3,243; 1960--2,621; 1961--2,538. Monthly breakdowns of these figures were submitted with Despatch No. 131 of September 29, 1961. A monthly breakdown of the 1961 total plus available figures to date for 1962 are enclosed as Enclosure 1.

At the present time violence is concentrated in Valle, Caldas and Tolima. Some sporadic violence also occurs in Santander, Cauca and Antioquia. The single area of most concentrated killings is currently along the valley of the Cauca River, covering the northern part of Valle, and the Quindio region covering the area of confluence of the departments of Valle, Caldas, and Tolima.

For analytical purposes the violence can be conceived of as consisting of two segments--active violence, meaning the actions and capabilities of bandit bands, and potential violence, meaning the para-military capability represented by ex-guerrilla caudillos and the geographical influence they wield:

B. Active Violence--the Cuadrillas

As previously noted present day violence is perpetrated by armed bands, technically known as cuadrillas, whose motivation up to now has been basically criminal.

1/ The various estimates of deaths during this ten-year period are a good example of how distorted the "facts" can become. When the drafting officer first came to Colombia over two years ago the most commonly accepted figure was 200,000. Since that time the "accepted" figure has been increasing, and now the most commonly heard estimate is 300,000. This latter figure is now widely quoted in journalistic accounts of Colombia's violence. Recently a reliable and careful American newsman queried the managing editor of one of Bogotá's leading newspapers regarding the basis for this estimate. The editor responded quickly and candidly by saying, "Oh, we i.e., the Liberals/ invented that figure to make the Conservative governments look bad." The editor then quickly calculated the monthly average implied by a 300,000 figure and remarked that such a death toll was impossible.

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A cuadrilla is a group of bandits whose size varies from 4 to as many as 50 men. The larger groups are the better organized and better armed and often equipped with stolen Army or Police uniforms which they wear on attacks. Each of the large cuadrillas has influence or "protects" a definite area or region within the violence zone. In most cases the cuadrilla exacts tribute in the form of money, clothes, food and even services, usually through intimidation. Sometimes the cuadrilla will actually defend its home region against incursions from other bandit bands. Whether through fear or gratitude, the average peasant is inclined to refuse to identify or denounce bandits living among them.

Except while on raids, the usual custom is for the cuadrilla members to live like other campesinos on farms or in small towns and to gather together on the cuadrilla chiefs' call. Generally its raids will be made in areas outside its own sphere of influence, i.e., for reasons mainly of robbery, intimidation or revenge killings of political opponents or government officials.

The smaller cuadrilla groups of 4-10 men have an embryonic organization, are not so permanent, and move around more. These groups are blatantly criminal usually, many made up of misguided and hardened youths, and normally they attack isolated farmers and travellers.

Enclosure 2 is an excerpt from [] which gives the "flavor" of the bandit operations and how these bands operate to influence the campesinos in the region. 25X1

It is virtually impossible to compile accurate data on the number of bands operating and the number of men involved, since cuadrillas form and disband almost daily. The most official estimate available to the Embassy is a tabulation by Headquarters of the Colombian Army which, as of February 28, 1962, had listed 140 cuadrillas in existence, 75 of which are listed as active and the remainder as inactive. 1/ A breakdown as to political affiliations and estimated number of total men involved is as follows:

	<u>ACTIVE</u>		<u>INACTIVE</u>	
	<u>No.</u>	<u>Total Men</u>	<u>No.</u>	<u>Total Men</u>
Liberals	38	526	24	291
Conservatives	14	150	7	114
Communists	4	89	-	-
Unknown Affiliations	19	232	34	722
Totals	75	997	65	1127

1/ The increase in the number of listed cuadrillas from that mentioned in Despatch No. 181 does not mean that there has been a sudden increase in the number of bands in existence. Evidence is that the increase is due rather to more complete reporting from Brigades to Hq. G-2. See R-220-61 and R-60-62 from USARMA Bogotá.

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Note should be made here of the meaning of "political affiliation" as applied to the cuadrillas. Most of the bands were formed out of the earlier guerrilla bands, which had both real political affiliation and political motivation, or were drawn from certain regions of the country where one or the other party predominates. In many cases the cuadrillas will profess an affiliation as a "cover" or justification for their existence. Hence the political affiliation label attached by the Colombian Army to these bands is more of an identification of their origin, professed leanings or background rather than an indication of their motivation (except possibly in the case of the few Communist oriented bands).

There is evidence of some coordinated action among a few bands. Thus there are reports that some of the cuadrillas in north Valle may be offshoots of or coordinated with some of the older cuadrilla complexes in north Tolima. Also there are reports that leaders of the larger cuadrillas often split their band up into a number of small squads that will operate separately. Such examples are limited, however, and it may be said that there is no evidence of comprehensive coordination among all of these armed groups. There are, moreover, some powerful built-in barriers to the achievement of such comprehensive coordination in that deep rivalries and bitterness exist among several of the bandit leaders, and jealousies over "muscling in on another's territory" have more than once led to armed retaliation.

In the pattern of active violence, note should also be made of the individual "anti-socials"--the individual criminal or gunman who hires out his services. In the violence area there are perhaps another 2,000 such persons and they may account for 5-10 percent of the deaths by violence.

C. Potential Violence--The Ex-Guerrillas

In the rural zones of the violence area and contiguous regions there exists a pattern of local control by local caudillos, who are in most instances ex-guerrilla leaders. This pattern is a direct residue of the political violence period, and the caudillos are the "natural" leaders who in many cases took up arms in that epoch. At the present time the great majority of these caudillos are not engaged in violence, but, rather, are engaged in normal pursuits, generally agricultural. The caudillos, nevertheless, exercise effective influence and authority over peasants in their particular sphere, and have arms available to them as well as the services of various numbers of men. They are closely affiliated with one of the political parties and this affiliation has real meaning to them. Actually a large amount of the Lleras Government's early (and controversial) pacification and rehabilitation effort was carried out through these caudillos--official crop loans and agricultural credits exchanged for pacification and policing of their areas by the caudillos.

The position of these ex-guerrilla leaders poses a puzzling dilemma. While they have effective authority and, as noted, have been used as instruments for pacification, their authority is their own. And until the authority of established legal government is made more effective in these regions, the situation will be potentially unstable. Similarly, these caudillos would like to see development of their region with construction of roads, schools, etc., but are at the same time loath to see any encroaching governmental influence which such public works might bring.

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These ex-guerrilla leaders have available to them groups ranging from 50 to 1,000 men who are ready to respond with arms to their chieftain's command, but who are currently also engaged in normal pursuits. In some cases the caudillos may actually train their men for instantaneous response to some challenge and may consciously stock arms for a future emergency. In one or two recorded instances such groups have been called to arms over jurisdictional disputes when other caudillos or bandits sought to infiltrate a given region.

The Colombian Army estimates that there are currently some 29 such caudillo-led groups in the country, identified as to political affiliation as follows:

	<u>No.</u>	<u>Total Men</u>
Liberals	13	2400
Conservatives	4	250
Communists	11	1680
Unknown Affiliations	<u>1</u>	<u>30</u>
Totals	29	4360

An accurate estimate of these groups is of course extremely difficult simply because they are passive and there are few ways to know how many actively organized groups there are or how many men are involved. It might be worth noting, however, that the highest that the Embassy has ever heard of the number of men that might be summoned to arms immediately if guerrilla warfare broke out is 10,000.

As in the case of the cuadrillas, there is little evidence of any unification among these different groups. Caudillos of the same party affiliation often feel a common bond springing from the sharing of arms in the political violence period, and these may be disposed to tactical coordination. On the other hand, bitterness and rivalries particularly among persons of opposing affiliations are deep and bitter, and jealousies over expanding their current sphere of influence are divisive characteristics. The fact is that should any of these groups resume violence there would in virtually every case be an immediate automatic counter force against them. This counter force pattern is most pertinent in the cases of the Communist caudillos who have bitter enemies among both Liberals and Conservatives, and the last two tend to be far more belligerent against the Communists than against each other. (See below for a discussion of the Communist caudillos.)

IV. The Potentials in Violence--Political Warfare and Subversion

The bandit and caudillo pattern described above readily suggests dangers potentially inherent in the violence problem. These possible dangers might be described as broadly two--a recurrence of political warfare of the type that existed ten to twelve years ago and the exploitation of existing para-military capabilities by subversive forces.

What would result in the countryside if the political understanding between the two parties should break down or suspicions and old bitterness be revived is sufficiently obvious to require little elaboration. The depth of feeling between

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the faithful of both political parties and the rivalries and bitterness among the caudillos is such that a belligerent response could be provoked--as it was once before--by a breakdown in the rational accommodation of the two parties or by a resort by one or the other to harsh treatment of its political adversaries. Such a breakdown and consequent reaction, it should be pointed out, could take place with or without relation to any Communist or subversive threat.

In the present circumstances of the National Front, there are factors, such as the basic good will of political leaders on both sides, which reduce the likelihood of such a possibility occurring. The ingredients are still there, however, and hence the possibility cannot be ignored as inconceivable or too remote.

A more worrisome question is what would happen if all or part of the bandit-caudillo para-military capability should be captured and used by subversive forces such as Communists. This potential may be said to rest on the following circumstances: a) insofar as bandit leaders have an amount of influence or hold over an area, and insofar as they are unscrupulous and desire to retain such control, they are susceptible to cultivation and subornation by subversive forces seeking an instrument of violence. Thus, it is conceivable, some interested elements may seek to use the bands (or caudillos), coordinate them and assist them with money and training; and b) the Communist Party has dominant influence and control in relatively small regions of the country and to that extent may be said to have a geographical base. (The latter point is discussed in detail in the next section.)

It is therefore pertinent to ask how far subversive elements may have insinuated themselves into the present violence picture and what their capabilities are to increase their influence in the future. The best estimate of the country team is that present criminal violence has up to now been influenced by Communist, Castroist or other leftist political extremists in only a minor degree. Similarly, a majority of caudillos are not Communist and in most cases are very anti-Communist.

There has been evidence that arms contraband traffic has existed for many years, such traffic entering the country mainly along the northwest coast from Panamá and across the Venezuelan border. There is some evidence that a portion of this recent traffic may have been financed by Castro sources. In point of fact, however, there is no available proof from any source which would permit this traffic to be quantified. This is no evidence that it occurs on a very large scale, and at no time have unusual amounts or types of arms appeared on the scene anywhere. There is, moreover, no confirmed report of the appearance of Soviet arms. There have also been reports that money has been used from Castroist sources and Communist sources to finance bandit bands and their supplies. Some of this has undoubtedly occurred, but again there is no evidence which would enable anyone to quantify it nor is there sufficient reason to believe that it has been on a large scale up to now. Propaganda has been circulated rather widely in rural areas, including Che GUEVARA's guerrilla manual.

There have been frequent allegations that non-Colombian "advisors" are active with guerrilla groups or bandits. Conceivably this may be true but no case can be confirmed or documented. There is evidence that some persons have gone to Cuba presumably for guerrilla training; the number probably does not exceed 100. Reportedly, some elements of such extremist groups as MOEC have made contact with

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some bandit bands. MOEC, however, has never demonstrated any organized capacity for subversion of any magnitude and the MOEC contact with cuadrillas has been based on individual contact, as far as evidence shows, rather than on any really wide organized effort. The Communist aspect is discussed below.

In short, therefore, the capacity of subversive groups including the Communists to influence and use cuadrillas has been minimal up to the present. Moreover, what activity by subversive elements has existed has been limited and designed more to gain a foothold rather than to mount an insurrection.

The real question then is the future possibilities: One can safely assume that subversive elements will press to increase their influence in this area. Because their position is presently weak, their immediate initial efforts will necessarily be aimed at winning acceptance and establishing capacity among the bandits or caudillos.

One interesting new element in this picture was the recent union of certain extreme elements in the Frente Unida de Acción Revolucionaria (FUAR) (see Despatch No. 563), which will probably be covertly supported by the Communists. FUAR will apparently be the recipient of Castro aid, and one [] source reports that money has already been made available to it from Cuba. FUAR will operate overtly and covertly in a wide range of sectors, and reportedly among these may be the violence field, with attempts made to "hire" active bands for terrorist purposes. Hence, the subversive attempts may become both more organized and more intense, and if these have any success at all the violence picture could change drastically in a very short time.

As previously noted there is one basic built-in barrier to an outbreak of insurrectional activity, and that is the deep rivalries among caudillos and bandit leaders. Thus any initiation of trouble by one sector will provoke an automatic counter reaction from another--Liberals will be opposed by Conservatives and Communists will be opposed by both Liberals and Conservatives. One often hears the thought expressed that another Castro might organize and catalyze these various forces into a dangerous insurrectional movement. Conceivably this might happen, but any wide massing of bands and caudillos in unified action would be extremely difficult. At present, too, there is no Castro-type visible.

This built-in barrier would not of course prevent subversively-inspired terrorist action which would strain the capabilities of public authorities and eat away at national morale. Moreover, it is more likely in the present circumstances that subversive forces would seek to stimulate political violence among groups and spread terror rather than mount an insurrection in the classical sense. The latter would provoke rather strong counter forces while the former might be easier to incite and by spreading wide political violence and terror promote the downfall of established order and government through the weight of the destructive energies released.

The Colombian Government's problem therefore is to reduce the para-military capability of both bandits and caudillos and the prospects of their utilization by subversive forces. The reduction of bandit activity to insignificance, which is

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basically a law enforcement problem, is a quite manageable problem in its present magnitude. The potential inherent in the caudillo pattern is a more delicate problem, and it will take determined, patient and across-the-board effort over an extended period. The final answer may very well lie simply in the solvent action of economic and social development.

A. GeneralV. The Communist Aspect

Communist influence in the violence area is located in approximately five general areas and varies in nature from the tight territorial control exercised in Sumapaz to loose propagandizing among peasants such as occurs around Armenia. The main bastions of Communist strength are the two enclaves of Sumapaz and Viota, both of which were organized some twenty years ago. Here Communist caudillos exercise effective influence and control over the inhabitants, and the Communist apparatus can use the region as a safe haven and training ground (see below). Somewhat looser control, especially in the sense of territorial control, is exercised by Communist caudillos in the area known as Alto Caquetá, a broad primitive region covering the confluence of Huila, Meta and Caquetá; the Gaitania region in Huila; and the Rio Cimbalo area of eastern Cauca. In these spots the influence rests on the dominance of the caudillo, but is not so complete that it results in a denied area as in the case of Sumapaz. Finally, there is Communist influence, but not dominance, among peasants in the Armenia and Libano area of the Quindio. This constitutes something of a competitive activity by Communist caudillos and elements with established non-Communist elements. The influence is hardly control, but it generates sufficient acceptance of the Communist leaders to warrant mentioning.

From time to time roving groups of Communist forces attempt to penetrate into other areas. An eastward movement from Sumapaz to the Western part of Meta, for example, took place some two years ago with limited success and partial withdrawal. The outbreak of a guerrilla operation with Communist overtones in Vichada in the llanos was promptly eliminated by the Military.

One fact to be noted is that in each of the Communist-influenced areas there are pressures containing outward expansion and, in some cases, actually pressing in on them. These pressures spring from either opposing Liberal or Conservative caudillos or simply the growth of developed areas and consequent government influence.

As far back as the establishment of the Viota enclave in the 1930's, the Communists gave attention to the development of para-military strength. This was designed as protective, rather than insurrectional strength, to defend the enclaves and safe havens. The militia so developed were termed auto-defense units. With the outbreak of political warfare in 1948-1953, the Party saw a chance to increase its influence among partisan units and expand its territorial influence. Communist elements and bands therefore did begin operating, usually posing as Liberals, but really constituting a third force. The effort of such elements to win over or penetrate the guerrilla partisans was largely unsuccessful and in some ways counter-productive because it aroused the lasting enmity of other caudillos, especially the Liberals.

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With the amnesty period of 1957-58 and the mutation of previous violence into criminality, the Communists dropped active violence as a tool, and proclaimed themselves "leaders" of rural peace. They, in fact, used the situation as support of the continued emphasis on auto-defense units to protect their territorial power. Since 1957 major emphasis has been placed on winning campesinos' support by propagandizing in terms of rural welfare and emphasis on past instances of government repression of rural populations. The key to the Communist Party's strategy since 1957 has been to protect its legal status. Communists have hence sought to disassociate themselves publicly from any violence activity so as not to provoke the retaliatory action of public authority. While doing this they have obviously kept their powder dry.

The Colombian Army estimates the armed men commanded by Communist caudillos at about 1600 men (Page 8). Non-official sources will estimate anywhere from this figure to fantastic numbers. Probably it could be assumed that Communist caudillos could count on another 2,000 men, so that an effective force of some 3,000-4,000 men among all groups might be fielded within a relatively short time.

It should be emphasized, however, that so far Communist rural activity has been passive, and not insurrectional, aimed at increasing the capabilities of enclaves and individual caudillos.

So much has been heard of the legends of the "Independent Republics" that special attention is given here to the two central enclaves under Communist control, Viotá and Sumapaz.

B. Viotá

This area is the legendary Holy land of the Communist Party in Colombia. It is a coffee-growing area of some 500 square kilometers about 50 miles from Bogotá. In the twenties the area was held by about four families, and the harsh treatment of campesinos and transient labor in the region made it a ripe plum for one of the early Communist-led attempts at land seizure. It fell into the control of the Communist apparatus in the early thirties, when Communist leaders organized the peasants by exploiting their real grievances and by stimulating land seizures. On the argument that it was necessary to protect these "advances" from reprisals by the authorities, the Communists were able to entrench their dominance and control over the region. This dominance and control became such that the influence of the Colombian Government was little felt and virtually never exercised. This combination of Communist influence and lack of government authority led to the legend of the "Republic of Tequendama". The high point of Communist control was reached, it is estimated, about ten years ago. At its peak the Communist leaders were able to convert the Viotá region into a denied area for strangers, to provide the region with an armed militia and government, and even to establish a type of currency.

The monolithic influence of the Communist Party in this region, however, has been declining. Through the actions of government and Church authorities, the area's isolation and control by the Communists has broken down. While the region still has what might be termed "semi-independent" status, outsiders are now able to travel unmolested within its geographic and political boundaries. Among the penetrations achieved by the Church have been the establishment of missionary residences in

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in Liberia and San Gabriel, two of the most important Communist settlements, and the establishment of schools for girls and boys as well as adult education and religious education centers. Following attainment of these penetrations, government authorities were able to build roads into the region and establish and maintain police outposts in the settlements of San Gabriel, Liberia, and Upper and Lower Palmar. Police Cavalry units with barracks are located now in these posts. Governmental authority is now being exercised to the extent that Victor Julio MERCHAN, the Communist chief of the region, recently (February 1962) found it necessary to obtain permission from the police inspector of San Gabriel to hold a Communist election rally in that settlement.

At the peak of its control the Communist-dominated sector of Viotá comprised the following general settlements with their contiguous areas:

<u>Settlement</u>	<u>Estimated Population</u>
Brazil 1/	1,000
San Martín	500
Liberia	700
Upper and Lower Palmar	2,400
Calandaima	800
Ceilsán	1,500
San Gabriel 2/	650
Alejandria	150
Ruidosa	700
La Dulce	240
Viotá	3,500
Total	12,140

25X1 According to [] Communist control is still complete over Brazil and San Martín and most of the inhabitants of the region are either members or sympathizers of the Communist Party. It is dominant in Upper and Lower Palmar, which appear to contain the area's major concentration of refugees from the other violence zones. Government authority, however, has penetrated to these two settlements with the establishment of schools and a carabinero barracks. Communist influence is strong in Liberia, but seems on the decline, largely as a result of missionary schools. It is quite strong in Calandaima and in Ceilsán, but the latter settlement shows Communist influence on the decline. Communist influence, according to [] has 25X1 died out of the settlements of San Gabriel, Alejandria, Ruidosa and La Dulce. San Gabriel, which used to be a center of munitions traffic for the Communists, has, according to one report, been written off by the Communists.

In the areas heavily controlled by Communists, Communist activity takes the form of propaganda, indoctrination, and rallies. In Brazil, which now seems the hub of

1/ Includes the famous Hacienda Florencia, long reputed to be the "inner fort" of Viotá.

2/ Includes the smaller caserías of Olivos, Costa Rica and California.

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Communist control, there are in addition schools for ideological indoctrination, military training and lectures by visiting Communist outsiders. Communist control is effected in these areas through a "Tequendama Regional Committee" which is headed by Victor Julio MERCHANT, the long-time Communist leader of the region. It is estimated that the number of men available both for internal policing and "auto defense" is about 1200-1500, not all under arms at once. Some of these are used for intimidation purposes to keep civilian inhabitants of these settlements in line.

Viota is valuable to the Communists as an asylum and safehaven area for Communist activity. And perhaps equally important is its psychological value deriving from its legendary history. In point of fact, however, Communist strength, and hence capability to use Viota as a base for subversive activity, has been declining. As one [] puts it:

"Viota has become the legend of the Colombian Communist. Those Communists and some other persons live outside the capital, and even those resident in Bogotá who do not know the real truth believe that Viota and the Tequendama region are a veritable Communist fort. They further believe that while this situation exists the revolution in Colombia can be kept alive, although dormant, while at the same time supplying work for its adherents and developing new leaders. These trained leaders are the men who will emerge as the military leaders to direct the final revolutionary triumph. This myth inspires great hopes among Communists because most of them really believe that Viota is a real military fort capable of repelling any assault by the government. They further think that the peasants of Viota are living in a "Soviet Paradise", since that is the way it has always been pictured to them. This is one of the primary factors having to do with influx of refugees from violence areas who are possessed with a great desire to reach the Viota paradise."

C. Sumapaz

Sumapaz is a region straddling the eastern cordillera of the Andes about 75 miles southwest of Bogotá and covering the zone where the Departments of Meta, Huila, Tolima and Cundinamarca join. The region is divided into three distinct areas by topographical features. One of these is comprised of the mountains and valleys which make up the watershed of the Sumapaz River; a second sector covers the eastern slopes of the cordillera between the Ariari and Guape Rivers and the third extends from the ridge down the western slopes to Villa Rica and Icononzo in Tolima. Except for a few secondary roads which reach the main population centers on the northwestern fringes of the region (Pasca, Cabrera, Santa Rita and Villa Rica), mule trains and footpaths provide virtually the only means of communication throughout this region of high mountains, swift rivers and dense forests. The authority of the national and departmental governments does not extend beyond the terminal points of the roads. For this reason there are no accurate figures for the population of the Sumapaz region, but it may be estimated that in the entire broad area there are between 15,000 and 20,000 peasants who live by raising cattle, potatoes, plantains, yuca, rice and coffee, depending on the altitude of their lands.

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Part of this region is under the control of a local caudillo named Juan de la Cruz VARELA, who has, since roughly 1948, been associated with and supported by the Communist Party. Varela's control sprang from the influence gained by an indigenous agrarian peasant movement which took form in the early thirties under the leadership of a Liberal peasant chieftain named Erasmo VALENCIA. Varela became Valencia's protégé and secretary general of Valencia's National Agrarian Movement. The Movement fostered squatter invasions of absentee-owned land in the region and defended such squatting, sometimes with legal counsel in courts. When Valencia died in 1934 Varela took over the movement and has been caudillo in the region ever since (see 21 report on Varela dated December 23, 1960).

The Sumapaz area is a patchwork of zones under conflicting influences and leadership. Varela's control rests in scattered pockets. The main sector of control is that section of the north-south cordillera running southeast of Pasca and east of Cabrera to a southern anchor on the Alto de Oseras. This is a roadless region high up in the Páramos de Sumapaz, encompassing the village of Sumapaz, and comprises about 30,000 hectares. It is sparsely populated with an estimated 1,500 people living in this zone. Reportedly, Varela has a finca in this zone east of Cabrera. In this region Varela is absolute boss, and government authority does not extend over the zone, a fact which may be due more to isolation than any other factor (the Caja Agraria has long programmed a road right through the heart of this region). In this area Varela has, reportedly, armed men policing the area. He levies and collects taxes on the peasants--or tribute.

Other zones of Varela's influence lie in a smaller region just south of Icononzo in Tolima and in a region around the town of Pandi. Here his control is less absolute and consists of influence with and acceptance by a good many of the inhabitants of the region. Another sector of control is on the eastern mountain slopes leading into Meta, near El Duda and Medellín del Ariari.

Varela's control rests partly on loyalty of peasants in the area who feel that he has defended them against the large landowners, and partly on intimidation. Catholic priests who have visited all but the most inaccessible parts of the region report that a good part of the peasants in the area submit to Varela's leadership out of fear and because, in the absence of any governmental authority, they really have no other choice if they wish to remain in the region.

Most of Varela's militia strength is concentrated in the core area in the Páramos de Sumapaz, with apparently some strongholds in Icononzo, near Pandi and El Duda. Apparently under present conditions, only a small number of men are under arms at any one time, most of these patrolling or guarding access points into the isolated areas. His hard core of armed followers is estimated at between 500-1,000 armed men, and he could probably count on some voluntary or compulsory support from many of the peasants living in the region if the area were under attack from the outside. One report in early 1961 alleged that on short notice Varela could muster no more than 400-500 men and a similar number could be mustered in ten days to two weeks depending upon the cause.

Varela's zones of influence are heavily hemmed in by hostile elements. The area around Arbeláez and San Bernardo is heavily Conservative. The Liberal caciques

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in the villages of Pandi and Pasca are anti-Varela, and his Sumapaz area is hemmed in on the northwest by a Liberal Caudillo named Rangel, centered in Cabrera, and on the southeast by a Liberal ex-guerrilla named Aljure in the Alta Ariari. Both maintain fairly constant pressure on Varela's flanks and keep him on guard. Similarly, Liberal elements in and around Icononzo confine his influence there, and the recent agrarian reform steps taken by the Government in the Cunday area should assist in this. The 1962 Congressional election results suggest that Varela's influence is eroding in this broad area, since the ticket he supported fared badly by and large compared to the regular Liberal slate.

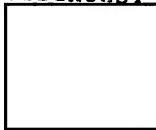
Varela's ties to the Communist Party seem to extend back to at least 1948 when he reportedly accepted money and arms from the Party to conduct guerrilla warfare against the then Conservative government (he was earlier reported to be an ardent Gaitanista). This was part of the then Communist tactic of seeking to take advantage of the guerrilla political warfare to spread the Party's influence (see above). As recently as 1957 he was reported to be a member of the Party's Executive Committee. Since 1959 he has operated in the MRL with steadily declining influence and acceptance among the López Michelsen crowd in that group. 1/

Sumapaz is much more typical of the caudillo pattern than is Viotá. The latter is and virtually always has been run by the Party. Sumapaz is run by Varela in classical caudillo fashion, although his acceptance of Communist aid and his cooperation in the Party gives the Communists effective use of the region.

For the Ambassador:

Viron P. Vaky
Viron P. Vaky
First Secretary of Embassy

Concurrences:



Enclosures:

1. Death Statistics
2. How the Bandits Operate

cc: Amconsuls Barranquilla, Cali, Medellín
ARA/WST, B. M. Lancaster
INR/RAR

- 1/ In his political career Varela was elected Liberal Deputy to the Tolima legislature in 1946. In 1958 he was elected Deputy to the Cundinamarca legislature on the Liberal ticket, and in 1960 was elected a substitute (suplente) for Alfonso López Michelsen as representative to the National Congress on the MRL ticket. In the last election he was elected to the Cundinamarca legislature on an MRL splinter ticket.

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From DogetDEATH STATISTICSDeaths by Violence

	<u>1951</u>	<u>1952</u>
January	334	301
February	217	263
March	226	243
April	261	
May	237	
June	253	
July	222	
August	245	
September	195	
October	215	
November	202	
December	231	
Totals	2,838	807

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From BogotaHOW THE BANDITS OPERATE

25X1 The following account of how bandit cuadrillas exact tribute is based on a raw [] and is submitted here as sample of the flavor of the situation in the violence zones:

An example of the thousands of similar cases that exist in the affected zones is the following:

The OLANO family owns rural property in a sector called Alto de Garcia in the north of Cauca. The Olano family pays 300 pesos monthly to the chief of the band which dominates the region. The Olano family does not know who the chief of the band is and confines itself to leaving the sum each month in a certain place in a package. It never occurs to them to set a trap for the cuadrilla for the simple reason that they know that whoever picks up the package is a go-between who likewise does not know the real identity of the bandit chief. Moreover, any double crossing by the Olano family would result in a bandit attack on the hacienda and the death of the peasants and destruction of all the cattle and crops. No member of the Olano family can visit their own lands. They are forced to leave them in control of an overseer and they receive in Cali such accounts as the overseer may render. It is to be presumed that the overseer has the approval of the bandit chief.

The case of the Olano family is typical of hundreds of other haciendas in the zones affected by banditry. There is no way to fight this, since the owners know that neither the police nor the army is in a position to guard all farms at once. And any visit by police or army units would provoke a raid once such units have left.

The little peasant pays less tribute but he nevertheless pays--some in money, some in fruits of their labor, some in services for the cuadrilla keeping them informed of government action at all times. The little peasant who does not render the tribute asked of him by the bandit chief will not long wait to see "his house assaulted, his wife and daughters violated and killed, himself and other members of his humble family murdered." This system of control thus converts the zones affected by violence into de facto authority paralleling legitimate authority.

It is impossible to calculate how much each cuadrilla might receive in the way of money in its zone. But certainly the bandit chief collects an appreciable sum each month.

Thus when one or more cuadrillas dominate a given zone, their authority is usually imposed over legitimate authority. In these circumstances the peasant population supports the cuadrillas out of fear, helps them and defends them to a certain point, so that it is impossible for Justice to find witnesses or even sincere guides or informers.

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